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RUEHSV/AMEMBASSY SUVA PRIORITY 0529
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STATE FOR EAP/EP, AND EAP/ANP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV NZ XV XU

SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND'S READ-OUT FROM PACIFIC ISLAND FORUM

REF: WELLINGTON 815

Classified By: DCM David J. Keegan for Reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: GNZ reports that initial concerns that the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) would be derailed over tensions between Solomon Island and Australia regarding the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomons (RAMSI) were resolved by private dialogue among Leaders during retreat. The sessions between Assistant Secretary Hill and the Leaders was seen by GNZ as especially helpful. The Leaders' communique, calling for review of RAMSI while endorsing its mission, kept momentum moving forward. The PIF targeted energy, transportation and communications as areas for development and requested a progress report by 2007 Forum. GNZ is developing visa scheme to enhance labor mobility for Pacific Islanders.

¶2. (C) On November 1, ECONOFF discussed New Zealand's assessment of the outcome of the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) meetings with Heather Riddell, Director of the Pacific Division at Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). Despite GNZ's initial concerns that regional tensions would make the PIF meetings complex and contentious, the final results turned out better than expected. The initial tension between RAMSI and the Government of the Solomon Islands (GOS), as well as Papua New Guinea's role in helping suspended GOS Attorney General Moti escape to the Solomons, were issues that GNZ feared could cause the Melanesian countries to take an "us vs. them" stance at the forum (see reftel). Riddell explained that GOS's opening position was a strong demand for reform of RAMSI with greater regional discussion to obtain independent review of its mission and a call for an exit strategy. Despite calls to also replace Forum Secretary General Greg Urwin as an anti-Australian gesture, Mr. Urwin's appointment was extended for another term.

RAMSI Reaffirmed but Under Review

3 (C) Riddell maintained that derailment of the forum was prevented by a private retreat among the Leaders which ensured that cooler heads prevailed. The Leaders formulated a communique expressing strong endorsement for RAMSI while simultaneously calling for close consultations with GOS and PIF. Leaders also agreed to establish a taskforce to review RAMSI and report back to Foreign Ministers who will make recommendations to Leaders. The consultative mechanism between the GOS, RAMSI and the PIF would be chaired by the representatives of the Forum Chair and involve senior representatives of the Forum Troika of past, present and incoming chairs. The timeframe for these reviews remains vague but GNZ would prefer sooner rather than later.

"Grass roots" Economic Priorities

¶4. (C) GNZ supports Leaders call for efforts to intensify regional cooperation in relation to energy, transportation and telecommunications (ICT). GNZ will be having additional consultations with the PIF Secretariat later this month to ensure that the adopted resolutions maintain traction. Their hope is that specific implementing action occurs prior to next forum. GNZ sees these economic sectors as having the greatest "grass roots" benefits.

Labor Mobility - Seasonal Work Scheme

¶5. (C) Riddell reported that GNZ is currently working with their Immigration Dept. to implement a seasonal work scheme to encourage NZ farmers and vintners to employ Pacific Islanders as short term agricultural workers. Under the new scheme, if accredited employers can demonstrate there are no Kiwis available to do the work, the Government will first consult with Pacific Island countries before making these jobs available to others. This scheme is not to detract from current working holiday permits.

McCormick